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ABSTRACT

This booklet offers parents a simple process and practical tools for dealing with school-age children's sometimes challenging behavior. Noting that the task of school-age children is to find out how the world works, the booklet begins with examples of common behaviors associated with this developmental task and the parent's role, as well as notes on four levels of responsibility which children will tend to move back and forth through as they assume duties such as household chores. Next, the booklet examines characteristics of children's temperaments, such as intensity and adaptability, and what characteristics can be changed. The booklet then presents five sets of tools for parents to encourage positive behavior and increasing responsibility: look for good behavior, avoid problems, acknowledge feelings, set appropriate limits, and teach new skills. For each tool set, the booklet lists individual tools and how to use them, and provides examples of the tool in use. The booklet then elaborates on the toolset concept with additional parenting ideas and tool use for addressing temper tantrums, homework hassles, and teasing of siblings. The booklet concludes with a process for choosing a toolset to address most problems encountered with school-age children, and for putting the tools into practice, noting three characteristics of effective parenting: reasonable expectations, a variety of guidance tools and a process for using them, and commitment. (HTH)

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Practical Tips & Tools

Understanding School-aged Children

by
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Parenting Press, Inc.
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Before You Begin

Do you want your child to . . .

- ★ be self-confident?
- ★ feel loved?
- ★ act responsibly?
- ★ get along well with others?
- ★ make independent decisions?
- ★ enjoy learning?

If you do, then this book is for you. We share the same goals.

This book —

explains briefly children's developmental tasks,
offers you tools to deal with children, and
offers you a process to solve your problems.

But it needs one thing from you — commitment!

Commitment first to look at your values and create a long-term vision. Then to adapt your vision to your child's age and temperament.

Commitment to take care of yourself so you have the time, energy, and patience to care for your child.

Commitment to try new approaches until you find something that works for both you and your child.

Developmental Tasks
What kids need to learn.

Margie (age 9) spends lots of time with her friend Sally. When she comes home, Margie goes on and on about Sally's mom. "She makes better cookies than you do." "She doesn't make Sally help with the dishes." "She is teaching Sally to sew." Why is Margie so critical of me? What's going on?

Although Margie's comments may sound critical, she is noticing different ways families do things. Up until now she has probably assumed all families do things the same way you do. The task of school-aged children is to find out about the larger world. They do this by asking lots of questions, challenging the way parents do things, and testing rules.

The chart below lists examples of common behaviors and the parent's role. The challenge for parents is to provide the information and limits kids need.

Developmental Task: To find out how the world works

Task	*Example*	*Parent's role*
To learn skills and learn from mistakes	• Asks lots of questions • Tries different behaviors	• Be a reliable source of information. • Affirm children's efforts to do things their own way. (Do not make fun of their attempts.)
To disagree with others and still be accepted	• Challenges parents' values; argues and hassles	• Encourage child to trust her own feelings to know what is right for her. • Remind your child that you love and care for him even when you disagree.
To learn the relevancy of rules and to experience the results of breaking rules	• Compares, tests, and creates rules • Breaks rules and experiences consequences of breaking rules	• Set and enforce needed negotiable and non-negotiable rules. • Be clear about who is responsible for what. • Act responsibly.

Paul (age 7) helps me clean his room, but he won't do it alone. His dad believes that now that he is in school he should have more responsibility at home. We have tried threatening him and bribing him but nothing works. How do we know what is reasonable to expect?

Children become more responsible gradually. They begin by helping with a task, then do the task with reminding or supervision. And, finally, they do the task alone. Many parents assume that because a child can do a task with the parent present, he or she can do the same task alone. Unfortunately, that is not true.

For some reason it is harder to be *responsible* for a task than it is to do the task itself. A child may be successful at a task for a couple of days or weeks, and then return to the previous level. As you can see in the table below, learning responsibility usually takes years, rather than weeks or days.

You can encourage cooperation by gradually involving the child in the responsibility, rather than demanding it. Four levels are:

Parent directs, child follows orders. Both work.	Parent might say, *You pick up the cards. I'll put away the clothes.*
Parent offers choices, child chooses. Both work.	Parent might say, *Do you want to put away the clothes or pick up the cards?*
Child directs, parent follows orders. Both work.	Parent might say, *What shall I pick up first?*
Child does most work. Parent waits until needed.	Parent might say, *You start cleaning your room. Call me if you need help.*

Strangely, children can work more independently when they know they can ask for help, than when they are told "don't come out until it's done."

Household Job Participation Chart

Excerpts from *Pick Up Your Socks*

Average age of children at different levels of responsibility. The letter indicates whether the child **H**elps with the task, does the task when **R**eminded or supervised, or does the task **A**lone (without supervision).

	Child's ages								
Task	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Dress self		Remind					Alone		
Pick up belongings	Help				R				A
Tidy room		H					R		A
Care for pet		H				R		A	
Cook meal				H		R			A

Understanding Children's Temperaments
What can we change?

"Jonathan, my friend's eight-year-old son, can sit through church without causing trouble. But my son, Adam, can't sit still or be quiet for more than five minutes. My friend says, 'Just take a book to occupy him,' but it just doesn't work with Adam. Is something wrong with my son?"

Probably not. Children have different temperaments. Some are physically quiet. Others are very active. Most are somewhere in between. Research has found nine traits that are relatively constant with age. Among them are: activity level, intensity, approach/withdrawal, adaptability, and persistence.

Children of the same age can be very different. In the hospital nursery you see some babies crying loudly. Others barely whimper. Some babies kick their covers. Others barely move.

How does temperament affect parenting? In two ways. First, you have a mental picture of what you expect your child to act like. If the child's temperament matches that picture, parenting will be easier for you. If not, you will need to revise your expectation. Second, some temperaments are simply more difficult to live with than others. If your child is active, loud, and persistent, your job will be harder.

What traits are best? Traits are neither good nor bad. Many traits that are frustrating in children are very useful in adults. For example, high activity and persistence are exhausting in a child. However, those same traits can be channeled by an adult to get things done.

Is it possible to change the basic temperament?
Yes, and it takes patience and consistency over a number of years. You can teach children the skills they need to live in the real world.

For example, you can teach an intense child to moderate her responses by taking deep breaths before responding, but you can't make her a quiet child.

Examples of Different Temperament Traits

Activity level: amount of movement

Active—some part is always moving. Often runs instead of walking.	Moderate—active at some times, still at other times.	Physically quiet—usually moves slowly, cautiously, or deliberately.

Intensity: degree feelings are shown

Very intense — everyone knows when he or she is happy or angry.	Moderately intense — people usually know when the child is upset.	Quiet, reserved—others are often unaware of child's feelings unless they look carefully.

Persistence: even when difficulties are present

Very persistent — child repeats activity 30 or 40 times.	Moderate persistence — child gives up after 10 or 15 tries.	Low persistence — child tries three or four times before giving up.

Approach/Withdrawal: initial response to new experiences

Reserved — resists most new experiences. Must be coaxed to try new things.	Moderate — approaches *some* new experiences. Is somewhat selective.	Open — approaches *most* new experiences with interest and enthusiasm.

Adaptability: ability to change

Slow to adapt — takes weeks or months to adjust to changes in people or places.	Moderate to adapt — takes days or weeks to adjust to changes in people or places.	Quick to adapt—takes minutes or hours to adjust to changes in people or places.

Parenting Tools

Why five sets of tools?

Why so many sets of tools? First, because you have many things to do. Second, because many tools make your job easier. It would be hard to cut wood if you had only a hammer and pliers. Similarly, it is hard to help children develop good self-esteem if all you know is how to set limits.

Tool set	*Reason we do this*	*Child will learn*
Look for good behavior	To increase positive behavior by noticing it.	Specifically what you expect of him or her. And that he or she can do things right.
Avoid problems	To reduce the hassles to a manageable number.	Limits are clear. *"I can do some things without getting in trouble."*
Acknowledge feelings	To recognize child's feelings without judging or agreeing.	To be responsible for own feelings. Child feels heard (loved) and can begin to deal with the situation.
Set appropriate limits	To establish clear boundaries and let kids test them.	Consequences of his or her actions. And how to make good decisions.
Teach new skills	To offer tools needed for the family and world.	To become more capable. He or she can learn new things.

Set 1
Look for Good Behavior
What you notice is what you get.

The behavior you notice and comment on is the behavior children will repeat. This is true even if your comment is nagging or yelling. Encourage desired behavior by looking for it, giving the child time to cooperate, and rewarding the desired behavior.

Tools	*How to do it*	*Example*
Give attention	Spend time together doing something fun.	Play a game with the child. Read a book together. Talk about silly things.
	Attention can be a smile, a nod, a hug.	Smile when the child comes into the room. Sit by the child as he reads.
Praise	Be specific.	*"You cleaned your room up without reminding. That's great!"*
	Be sincere.	*"I'm pleased with how long you entertained your sister."*
	Respond immediately.	*"Thank you for helping me carry in the groceries."*
	Acknowledge the child's effort.	*"Boy, you kept practicing those math facts even when it was hard."*
Encourage behavior	Use *natural* rewards inherent in the situation.	To hungry child, *"We can eat as soon as the table is set."* (Eating soon is a reward for setting the table.)
	Use *external* rewards.	*"You may watch a video when your homework is done."* ***Or,*** *"Each night you brush your teeth and get ready for bed without reminding, you get a star. When you have five stars, you may stay up half an hour later on Friday night."*

Set 2
Avoid Problems
Pick your battles.

You can avoid many problems by reducing stress, by changing things, or by offering choices.

Tools	*How to do it*	*Example*
Reduce stress	Get physical exercise.	Jog around the block. Dance to music.
	Plan transitions.	When the timer rings, it will be time to set the table.
	Allow *enough* time for activities.	Try 15 minutes for six-year-old to dress. Try 10 minutes to find things for school.
Change things	Put things away.	Put TV away so it doesn't become a source of conflict.
	Add things.	Ask child to bring a book to doctor's office.
	Change the routine.	Take a different route home so kids don't see hamburger shop.
	Change the schedule.	Get up earlier so you have more time in the morning. ***Or,*** Cook large batches of dinner and freeze extra so you don't need to cook each night.
Offer two yeses	Tell the child what he *may do.*	*"It is raining. You may wear your raincoat or take an umbrella."* ***Or,*** *"No cookies an hour before supper. You can have carrots or fruit now or cookies for dessert."*

Set 3
Acknowledge Feelings
Differentiate between feelings and behaviors.

"It's okay to be mad, and you may not hurt someone." Children need to know you accept their feelings (not judge or try to fix them). When you accept children's feelings they can begin to deal with the problem. Often simply acknowledging their feelings reduces objectionable behavior.

Tools	*How to do it*	*Example*
Simple listening	Use comments like: Uh-huh, okay, really? Oh, yeah, hum, tell me more, etc.	Maggie was mean to me. *Oh.* She hurt my feelings. *Hmm.* She called me a klutz. *Really?* I bumped into her in line. *I see.* I'll apologize. *Okay.*
Active listening	Reflect back both the *feeling* and the *content* of the situation.	*"Looks like you're frustrated you can't draw a horse."* **Or,** *"You're mad you can't go camping with your brother."*
Grant in fantasy	Give the child in pretend what you can't give him in real life.	Child wants very expensive shoes. Dad says, *"I wish I had a pair for you. I wish I had a dozen for you. I wish I won the lottery and could buy all the name-brand shoes in town and dump them in your room."*

Set 4
Set Appropriate Limits
Rules can be negotiable or non-negotiable.

Children need reasonable limits or rules. Most children test limits. Persistent children test limits many times. Remember, persistence is an excellent adult trait. You want to guide it, not crush it.

Provide clear, age-appropriate rules. Back them up with reasonable consequences and dependable follow-through. The rules can be negotiable or non-negotiable.

Non-negotiable Limits

Tools	*How to do it*	*Example*
Clear rules	Check the child's devel-opmental tasks.	Child forgets to feed the dog. Seven-year-olds—usually need help feeding a pet (see page 5) so don't make a rule. Eleven-year-olds—can usually remember so make a rule.
	Use positive language.	*"No hitting"* → *"Touch gently."* *"No throwing"* → *"Roll the ball."* *"Don't run inside"* → *"Walk inside."*
Reasonable consequences	Give a real choice.	*"You can do your homework after school or immediately after supper."*
	Relate behavior to consequence.	**Or,** *"If you chose to play in the afternoon, you chose to work in the evening and miss the television."*
	Be gentle and firm.	***Or,*** *"I see you choose to study this evening."*
Follow through	Remind once.	To child watching TV before finishing homework, say, *"Oops, you forgot to practice your spelling,"* and then turn the TV off.
	Carry through gently.	To child who turns TV on again, *"I see you choose for me to remove the TV."* Then take the TV from the room.

Tools	*How to do it*	*Example*
Find A Better Way	*A Better Way* is an idea suggested by the child that both parent and child like.	To nine-year-old, *"You want to play ball right now. I want to finish putting away the laundry before we go. What is a better way?"* In this case the child replied, *"I'll help you put the clothes away,"* which was fine with Dad. ***Or,*** To six-year-old who doesn't want Mom to put medicine on the sunburn, *"My way is I put the medicine on. Your way is no medicine. What's a better way?"* The child offered, *"I want Daddy to do it."*

Children need both non-negotiable rules and negotiable ones. Non-negotiable limits teach obedience. Negotiable rules teach responsibility.

Non-negotiable rules are needed for safety and moral issues: wear a seat belt, wear a bike helmet when biking, ask before you use other people's things, touch people gently.

Negotiable rules teach children to think about the situations and act responsibly. Negotiable rules have another benefit; they encourage cooperation. Either the children or the parents can start negotiations for negotiable rules.

Non-negotiable rule	*Negotiable rule*
Bedtime 9 P.M., always.	**Bedtime 9 P.M. except on special occasions, like holidays.**
Leave my tools alone. (Don't touch.)	**"*If* you want to use my tools, ask me and we can discuss it."**
Do your chores Saturday morning.	**Do chores Saturday morning unless arranged otherwise *beforehand.***
No food the hour before supper.	**"Ask me if you want something to eat the hour before supper."**

Set 5
Teach New Skills
Children need tools also.

Teach new skills (such as study skills, cleaning a room, motivating oneself, or managing anger) by modeling, dividing the task into small pieces, and re-do it right.

Tools	*How to do it*	*Example*
Modeling	Model the desired behavior.	*"I'm so mad. I'm going to take five deep breaths before I decide what to do."*
Shaping	Divide the skill into "mini steps" that are easier for child to do.	• Make paper placemats with places marked for plate, glass, silver, and napkin. Give the child the items to put on the placemat. • Child gets the items himself to set on the placemat. • Child sets table with regular placemats.
Re-do it right	Go with child to where he made the error. Remind him of the correct behavior.	Walk to child and say, *"Oops, you forgot to hang up your towel."* Put your arm around him and walk him back to the towel. Hand him the towel and walk pleasantly with him to the towel bar.

Summary of Tools

The more different tools a parent uses, the easier parenting will be. Most parents find that when they have a recurring problem, they need to try a different group of tools. When you start using new tools, they often seem awkward or silly or frustrating.

Practice using the tools in easy situations. When you get more skilled you can try them in challenging situations.

Tool set	*Purpose of tool set*	*Example of tools*
Look for good behavior	To increase good behavior by noticing it.	Give attention Praise Reward
Avoid problems	To focus on what is most important.	Reduce stress Change things Offer two yeses
Acknowledge feelings	To recognize children's feelings without judging or agreeing.	Simple listening Active listening Grant in fantasy
Set appropriate limits	To establish clear boundaries and let kids test them.	Clear rules Reasonable consequences Dependable follow-through Find A Better Way
Teach new skills	To offer skills needed for the family and world.	Modeling Shaping Re-do it right

Parenting Ideas

Temper Tantrums

Situation: *Sarah (age 9½) is in a snit again. This time she didn't get the part of princess in the class play. Sarah alternates between putting herself down ("Nobody likes me." "I'm stupid.") and criticizing others. She is unpleasant both at school and at home.*

Reality check:

- *Know what you want*—Sarah needs to learn to deal better with disappointment, otherwise she will be miserable her whole life.
- *Development*—Children usually learn to deal with their feelings as preschoolers. You will need to *teach* Sarah constructive ways to express feelings.
- *Temperament*—Sarah is a fairly intense child. When she is happy, she is boisterous. When she is mad, she is very loud.

Tool set	*How this point might work*
Avoid problems	***Reduce stress*** so Sarah has more reserves to deal with disappointment—get exercise and allow *enough* time. ***Change things or schedule.*** Help Sarah find another position in the production that she would be good at. ***Offer two yeses.*** *"You may be critical of others and see what happens, or you can find a way to show them how wonderful you are."*
Acknowledge feelings	***Simple listening.*** When she talks about her disappointment respond with non-committal acknowledgment like: *Uh-huh, okay, really?, oh, yeah, humm,* etc. ***Active listening.*** *"You're disappointed you didn't get the part you wanted."* ***Grant in fantasy.*** *"Wouldn't it be fun if you could always have whatever role you wanted? You could just think about a play and all the players, props, and scenes would magically appear."*

Look for good behavior

Attention. Smile at her when Sarah is pleasant.

Praise. *"I noticed you rephrased your comments."* Or, *"I'll bet you're proud of the way you calmed yourself."*

Reward desired behavior. Tell Sarah, *"I have an idea. I'll give you ten big buttons to put in your pocket. Each time you notice yourself being critical, stop. Take a button out of the pocket. Think of something nice to say and then put the button in your other pocket. When you have refocused yourself ten times, we will make bread together."*

Set appropriate limits

Clear, reasonable rules. *"Deal with your own problems, don't dump them on others."* (It's okay to be disappointed. It's not okay to be obnoxious.)

Consequence. Talk pleasantly or criticize people alone.

Follow through. Leave the room if she is obnoxious.

Find A Better Way. *"Sarah, my way is we speak respectfully to people. Your way is to vent your feelings. What's a better way? — something we will both like?"* Sarah might reply, *"I could write my feelings in a diary or talk into a tape recorder."*

Teach new skills

Skill: dealing with her feelings

Shaping. Teach Sarah to change her self-talk.

1. List the negative things Sarah says to herself.
2. Work with Sarah to make a list of benefits for each negative thing. *("I'm slow," becomes "I don't bump into people.")* Write the benefits on slips of paper.
3. Ask Sarah to put the slips in a pocket. When she says something negative, she can read two positive slips.

Model dealing with disappointment. When a friend can't get together, say, *"I'm so disappointed. I was really counting on seeing Mary on Saturday. I think I'll ask Ruth to the Rose Gardens instead."*

Re-do it right. Say, *"Oops, you forgot to take five deep breaths."* Then put your arm around Sarah gently and breathe with her.

Homework Hassles

Situation: *My son Andy, in 5th grade, is not turning in his homework assignments. He enjoys the work, but has difficulty getting it done and turned in on time. I have tried to let homework be his responsibility but it isn't working.*

Reality check: You are right to be concerned. You want Andy to be independent and also successful. Sometimes that balance takes work.

- *Know what you want*— Homework done and turned in on time.
- *Development*—By 5th grade most children can do their homework. Homework problems may result from power struggles, desire for attention, lack of study skills, or not knowing how to focus or to motivate one's self.
- *Temperament*—Moderately distractable temperaments may have difficulty staying focused or remembering to turn homework in.

Tool set	*How this point might work*
Teach New Skills Skill: self-monitoring	***Shaping.*** 1. With Andy, create a checklist for the steps needed to get his homework to school. For example, • Write down assignments. • Bring home assignments. • Review assignments and do homework. • Put completed homework in the folder in notebook. • Put the notebook in his backpack. • Put his backpack by the front door. • Check off steps he has completed. 2. With Andy decide on a reward for success. 3. Parent monitors Andy's follow-through with the checklist and provides the reward. 4. Andy monitors and rewards himself. ***Re-do it right.*** *"Oops, you need to put your homework in your folder and check it off your list."* ***Model.*** Parent models using a checklist posted in a visible location to remember to do something.

Set limits	***Clear rule.*** *"Homework completed and put away by 8 p.m."* Put away means—in the folder, in your notebook, in your backpack by the front door. ***Consequence.*** If the steps are not checked off at 8:05, Andy will have to stop whatever he is doing immediately and complete them. ***A Better Way.*** *"Your way is to do your homework when you feel like it. My way, you do your homework right after school. What is a better way?"*
Look for good behavior	***Attention.*** Notice when Andy puts his homework in the folder on time and smile at him. ***Praise.*** *"You are doing so well remembering to get your work to school."* ***Rewards:*** Each time Andy's work is completed and turned in he will get a ticket. Andy may suggest items the tickets may be used for — for example, 5 tickets to stay up 30 minutes later on Friday night. Parents okay the ideas. Homework turned in will be confirmed by a list sent home by the teacher.
Acknowledge feelings	***Simple listening.*** Andy cries frantically, *"I can't find my homework that I did."* Mom, ***"Hmm."*** *"I left it on the floor."* ***"I see."*** *"Someone must have taken it."* ***"Hmm."*** *"Oh, here it is."* ***"Really."*** ***Active listening.*** *"You feel disappointed that you got a C in math."* Or, *"You're sad you forgot to turn in several of your math assignments."* ***Grant in fantasy.*** *"Wouldn't it be fun if you could mentally transport your homework to your teacher's desk as soon as you're done?"*
Avoid problem	***Change things.*** Have a box by the front door for the backpack and other material Andy takes to school. ***Reduce stress.*** Plan "activity breaks" from study. ***Two yeses.*** *"Your homework must be completed by 8 p.m. You can choose when to start your homework and tell me or we can negotiate a time."*

Teases Sibling

Situation: *Bradley (age 9) teases Allie all the time. Sometimes he dangles a toy above her and yanks it away when she reaches for it. Or he chants, "Allie is a cry baby." They got along well this summer, but since school started he's been a beast. When I try to talk with him, he says I'm picking on him.*

Reality check:

- *Know what you want*—Play nicely with Allie or leave her alone.
- *Development*—Since Bradley used to get along with Allie, he probably has the skills to get along with her. He may be trying a behavior that he saw somewhere or taking out school frustrations on his sister.

If he is trying a new behavior, it may pass quickly when you set and enforce a limit. If he is upset about something that happened at school, it may take detective work to discover the problem. Then you will need to acknowledge his feelings and teach him skills to deal with the situation at school.

- *Temperament*—If Bradley is intense and persistent, changing his behavior will take more energy than if he is mild and distractable.

Tool set	*How this point might work*
Avoid problems	***Reduce stress.*** Make sure Bradley gets lots of exercise. ***Change things.*** Spend some fun one-on-one time with Bradley when he first gets home from school so he will feel calmer. ***Give two yeses.*** Say, *"You may read to Allie or play by yourself."*
Look for good behavior	***Attention.*** When he is kind to Allie, give him the "well done" sign. ***Praise.*** Say, *"Wow! Look at Allie's smile. She likes playing with her big brother."* ***Reward.*** Say, *"When you say something nice to Allie, you can put one marble in the jar. When you play pleasantly with her put two marbles in. When the jar's full we'll go to the zoo."*

Acknowledge feelings	***Simple listening.*** When he talks about school or his sister, listen to him. Make non-committal responses like, *"I see," "Really."* ***Active listening.*** Say, *"I'm wondering if you are frustrated about something that's happening at school."* ***Grant in fantasy.*** Say, *"Wouldn't it be fun if you were King and everyone always did what you wanted."*
Set appropriate limits	***Age-appropriate rules.*** Treat people kindly. If you have a problem, work it out together. ***Reasonable consequences.*** You could say, *"When you hurt someone, make amends. The amends must be something to help her think kindly of you. For example, you could do something fun with her, or apologize and explain how you will keep the situation from happening again. Let me know what you decide."* ***A Better Way.*** *"Your way is to vent your feelings. My way is to respect people. What is a better way? Something that works for both of us."*
Teach new skills Skill: dealing with feelings	***Modeling.*** Talk about how you deal with anger. For example, *"Today at the mall I got so mad at a mean clerk, I wanted to bop someone. Instead, I walked briskly from one end of the mall to the other. Then I felt better."* ***Shaping.*** Teach Bradley to ask himself "Is that true?" and then decide if he wants to be upset. 1. Model process. *"At work today Kirk told me I was lazy and my work was never in on time. When he left I felt bad, then started to think 'Is that true? Am I always late?' I checked and found eight reports were on time and one was late. One late report doesn't make me bad or lazy. I will let Kirk's comments float away."* 2. Brainstorm ways Bradley could deal with unkind comments, for example, think of things he does well or imagine the mean words floating away. 3. Play Bradley's roles. I will ask Bradley to act like a mean kid at school and then I will show how the 'victim' might resist the meanness. 4. Play the mean role. Let Bradley practice using the process. ***Re-do it right.*** When Bradley starts to tease, say *"Oops. You forgot to speak pleasantly."* Put your arm around his shoulder and walk with him away from Allie and then back again. *"Now, you can start again pleasantly."*

Solving Problems with the Tools

You can use the sets of tools to solve any problems you face. Here's a sample problem to show you how.

Steps	*Sample problem*
1. Describe the problem. • Be specific. • What does the child say or do that is a problem?	*Getting ready for school in the morning is a trial. Jane (age 6) dawdles. As long as I am with her, she stays focused. If I leave, she gets distracted.*
2. Gather information. • How often does it happen? • When does it happen? • Is the behavior common for the child's age?	*She needs reminding 4 or 5 days a week. She dawdles mostly on weekdays. On the weekend the schedule is more flexible.* (**Note:** Six-year-olds often need reminding to get dressed. See page 5.)
3. Decide what you want. • Be specific. • What do you want your child *to do*? (Instead of ***not*** do)	*I want her to stay focused on dressing until she is done.*
4. Look for ideas. List as many ideas as you can. Try to find at least two ideas for each category. • ***Look for good behavior*** Give attention Praise Reward	*Some ideas I can try are:* ***Give attention.*** *Sit nearby and watch while she dresses, then leave when she gets distracted.* ***Praise.*** *Say, "Great! You stayed focused while you dressed."* ***Reward.*** *Tell her, "I will set the timer for 15 minutes. As soon as you are finished dressing, I will read to you until the timer rings."*
• ***Avoid problems*** Reduce stress Give two yeses Change things	***Change things.*** *I could let her dress in the dining room where there are fewer distractions.* ***Two yeses.*** *I'll say, "Do you want me to help you dress or do you want to dress by yourself?"*

- ***Acknowledge feelings***
  - Simple listening
  - Active listening
  - Grant in fantasy

Active listening. *I could say, "You're frustrated that you have to hurry getting dressed for school."*

Grant in fantasy. *I could say, "Wouldn't it be fun if you could walk through a special machine each morning that would change your clothes and brush your teeth real fast."*

- ***Set appropriate limits***
  - Clear rules
  - Consequences
  - Follow through
  - A Better Way

Clear rules. *"Dress first. Play when dressed."*

Consequence. *If something distracts you, we can remove it or you may dress in the dining room.*

Follow through. *If Jane gets distracted, remove the item or change locations.*

- ***Teach new skills***
  - Modeling
  - Shaping
  - Re-do it right

Modeling. *Jane and I could dress at the same time. I could share with her how I stay focused.*

Shaping. *I could draw pictures of steps in getting dressed (pajamas off, underpants on, undershirt on, shirt on, pants on, socks on, and shoes on). Then, give her the "pajamas off" card. When she is undressed, give the "underpants on" card. Continue until she is dressed.*

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5. Make a plan, try it, and revise it.

- Look at your ideas.
  - What will work best for you?
  - What will work for your child?
- Choose an idea.
- Make a plan.
- Try the plan.
- Revise it, if needed.

Choose an idea. *I will model staying focused when I dress and then praise her when she stays focused.*

Make a plan. *I will start modeling staying focused on the weekend. I will distract myself and then turn my back so I can't see distraction. I will praise Jane for staying focused and refocusing if she gets distracted.*

Revise it, if needed. *If this doesn't work, I'll make the shaping cards or try rewarding her.*

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Putting Tools into Practice

There are three things it takes to be an effective parent — reasonable expectations for children, a variety of guidance tools, and parental commitment.

Reasonable expectations. Children differ both by age and by temperament. Behavior that is reasonable for one child may be impossible for another. If your expectations are unrealistic, you will only succeed in frustrating yourself and your child.

Tools. You now have sixteen tools. The tools are organized into five sets: Tools to avoid problems, look for good behavior, acknowledge feelings, set appropriate limits, and teach new skills. The more sets of tools you use the easier it will be to solve your problem.

Process. You can use these tools in many ways. To solve the problem: (1) describe the problem, (2) gather information, (3) decide what you want and (4) then look for ideas. When you have ten or fifteen ideas (5) make a plan. The plan can involve several ideas.

Commitment. Commitment involves looking at your values so you can develop a long-term vision. Commitment involves taking care of yourself so you have the energy and desire to care for your children. You have made a start by reading this booklet.

Best wishes as you put these parenting tips and tools to work!

Look inside for quick help!

Parenting Tips & Tools is a handy booklet that shows you a simple process and practical tools for dealing with children's challenging behavior.

- Discover 16 tested tools to make your job easier.
- Learn how your child's age and temperament affect his or her behavior.
- Find lots of ideas for dealing with tantrums, hitting, and power struggles.

About the author. Elizabeth Crary has worked with children and parents for almost thirty years, and teaches at North Seattle Community College. She gives talks to parents and professionals all over North America. She and her husband are the parents of two grown children.

Ms. Crary is the author of 27 books. Among her parenting books are *Without Spanking or Spoiling, Love & Limits, Pick Up Your Socks,* and *365 Wacky, Wonderful Ways to Get Your Children to Do What You Want.* Among her favorite children's books are *I'm Mad, I'm Frustrated,* and *I'm Scared* (Dealing with Feelings series), and *I Want It, I Can't Wait, I Want to Play,* and *My Name Is Not Dummy* (Children's Problem Solving series). Ms. Crary's books give parents and children skills to deal with other people.

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